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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001970

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [BA](#) [POL](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS 10: UPDATED RESULTS

REF: MANAMA 1963

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: King Hamad, in responses November 27 to congratulatory cables from the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince, praised the participation of the Bahraini people in the election, which he said reinforces Bahrain's status as a kingdom of constitution and laws. Election result updates released late November 26 revealed that two additional seats were decided by first round voting, leaving only 11 runoff races scheduled for December 2. Waad candidate Dr. Munira Fakhro lost in one of the races, but there are reports she is considering contesting the results due to alleged irregularities involving her competitor Dr. Salah Ali. Published vote percentages in individual races revealed that several Al Wifaq candidates won by overwhelming margins, topped by one candidate receiving 92% of his district's votes. Of the four Sunni opposition candidates remaining in the second round races, two have a moderate chance of being successful. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) KING HAMAD PRAISES POLLS, PARTICIPATION: In a response to cables of congratulations from the Prime Minister and Crown Prince, King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa expressed his gratitude to the Bahraini people for fulfilling their democratic duties by going to the polls in such large numbers, commenting that this participation reinforces Bahrain's status as a kingdom of constitution and laws. Separately, judges of the High Commission for Elections issued a statement November 26 praising the huge participation in the election as a "tangible indication of voters' confidence in the transparency of elections and the importance of exercising one's constitutional rights."

¶3. (SBU) UPDATED ELECTION RESULTS: As more complete returns were tallied late in the day November 26, election officials announced two additional races. This brings to 29 the number of seats that have been decided, leaving 11 runoff races for December 2. The beneficiaries of the two additional seats are Sunni Islamists with one seat going to Al Asala (Salafi) and another to Al Minbar (Muslim Brotherhood), resulting in four seats for each political society and four candidates (one from Al Asala, three from Al Minbar) still alive in the runoffs. Election turnout was confirmed to be 72%, with over 212,000 of the approximately 295,000 registered voters participating. Official election spokesperson Ahdeya Ahmed confirmed that in addition to the district polling centers, the general polling centers would be used in the second round runoffs.

¶4. (C) AL WIFAQ MANAGES EXPECTATIONS: Many candidates of leading Shia opposition political society Al Wifaq notched big wins. For example, Shaikh Haider Al Sitri received 92%, Shaikh Hamza Al Dairi received 90%, Abduljaleel Khaleel received 89%, and Shaikh Ali Salman received 84% of their respective districts' votes. In the evening November 26,

cars of Al Wifaq supporters could be heard honking their car horns in celebration in and around Shia neighborhoods. To put the victory in perspective, however, Al Wifaq Secretary General Shaikh Ali Salman told the press, "Our participation (in the parliament) is limited. (Our victory) is a positive step, but let's put this participation in perspective. There are 40 people appointed by the King with the same legislative powers." He also said publicly on November 25, "When I speak to supporters, I feel I have to acknowledge, yes, not much is going to change. But I try to emphasize to people that you are better off having someone looking out for your interests within the system, even if he wins only small victories."

15. (SBU) DR. MUNIRA, WOMEN COME UP SHORT: Waad candidate Dr. Munira Fakhro was one casualty of the two additional races being decided as her competitor Dr. Salah Ali finished with 53% of the vote in the district. Fakhro took 42% of the vote, receiving 3,196 votes to Ali's 4066 votes. Of the other seven candidates in the district, none received over two percent of the vote. In the next most competitive race involving a woman, independent candidate and head of programming at Bahrain Television and Radio Fawzia Zainal received 34% of votes cast in her district (2,598 votes) versus 56% (4,344 votes) to the district's victor. Amal Al Jowder received 16% of votes (1,529 votes) in her district and Women's Union president Mariam Al Ruwaie received 14% (534 votes) in her district.

16. (SBU) Arabic daily Al Wasat reported that Fakhro is considering contesting the results due to an unusually large number of votes for Salah Ali from the general polling centers. Al Wasat reported that Ali received more than 1,000 more votes from the general centers than Fakhro, and he received more votes through the general centers than any

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other election candidate nationwide. Sources close to Fakhro said she had held a meeting in the evening November 26 regarding military personnel voting for her competitor.

17. (SBU) Arabic daily Al Ayam reported the comments of Al Asala candidate and second deputy speaker of the Council of Representatives Adel Al Mo'awada in an interview with Al Jazeera satellite channel regarding women candidates. He said, "Despite the fact that women candidates had more support (official technical support and training) than men candidates, their failure to reach parliament was natural and expected. This is not an underestimation of the role of women; even women in the West have not attained what men have reached." In reaction to Al Mo'awada's statements, Munira Fakhro told Al Wasat newspaper, "We don't expect these people (Sunni Salafis) to view women any better than this. In fact, our expectation is that they would say even worse things."

18. (C) FOUR OPPOSITION CANDIDATES REMAIN: In the December 2 runoffs there will be four Sunni opposition candidates participating: three Waad candidates and independent candidate Abdul Aziz Abul. Receiving 43% of first round returns from a field of seven candidates, Abul may have the best chance against his competitor Abdulhakeem Al Shamari, who received 31% of the vote. Supporters of Shia cleric Shaikh Ahmed Al Mahoozi, who received 12% of votes, and female Shia candidate Dhawiya Al Alawi, who received 11% of the district's votes, will likely support Abul in the runoff. Running neck-and-neck in Muharraq, Waad's Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi received 37% against incumbent Isa Abulfatah's 38%. Al Nuaimi can expect to receive support from those who supported female Shia candidate Zahra Muradi, but she received only 11% of her district's vote, leaving Al Nuaimi just shy of a majority. Victory for Al Nuaimi will depend on how heavy voter turnout is and how many of the remaining voters he can reach.

19. (C) As for Waad's Ibrahim Sharif, he trailed independent candidate Abdulrahman Bumjeed 47% to 40% in the first round. Prior to the election, Sharif told Emboffs that Bumjeed had

solid control of a sizable portion of the district, and he would have a difficult time reaching these voters. Sharif will now need to focus his attention on the 13% who voted for the other two candidates in the district. The final Waad candidate Sami Siyadi received 32% of the vote in his district against 42% for leading candidate Sunni Islamist Naser Al Fadhala from Al Minbar. In a more conservative district, it is likely that the quarter of voters who voted for the remaining four candidates will throw their support behind Al Fadhala and he will come out ahead.

¶10. (C) ELECTION IRREGULARITIES/VIOLATIONS: In addition to the violations noted in reftel, Vice President of the Bahrain Human Rights Society and one of the organizers of the Election Monitoring Joint Committee (EMJC) Dr. Abdulla Al Durazi told Poloff November 27 that busloads of military personnel were reportedly transported to two of the general polling stations, one next to the Bahrain Defense Forces Hospital and the other in the relatively remote Southern town of Awali, to vote. He said that observers had noticed in the case of at least one bus that those who got off the bus were handed their passports as they disembarked. (Note: Photos of one of these buses can be seen on Al Wifaq's web site www.alwefaq.org.) He also said there were indications that many of the extra votes received by Dr. Salah Ali came from these general polling centers.

¶11. (C) Bahrain Transparency Society president Dr. Jasim Al Ajmi told Poloff that even in the face of the above reports, there is not enough evidence to prove that those who were transported in buses were those who voted for Ali. And even if this could be proved, there is not enough evidence that they voted due to pressure from their superiors. The secrecy of the ballot box is necessary, but it also serves to limit evidence in cases like this. When asked whether voter lists of those who cast their ballots had been released to the candidates, as had been announced days prior to the first round, Al Ajmi said that they had not been provided as yet, and he did not have information about when they might be released. He said that EMJC had also requested results from individual general polling stations, but the information had not been provided yet.

¶12. (C) A TELLING POLITICAL CARTOON: Arabic daily Al Ayam printed a political cartoon by Khalid Al Hashemi November 27 that was simple in its presentation, but profound in its message. It depicts two Islamists, one Sunni and the other Shia, carrying two ends of a ballot box. The two men are looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes with looks of concern and suspicion etched on their faces. The cartoon indicates that even though the new parliament will be

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significantly more Islamic - already 24 of the 29 MPs are members of Islamist political societies - the overriding characteristic of the new parliament is the sectarian divide.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: Now that the first round results are in, focus shifts to the runoff elections, in particular the four races involving Sunni oppositionists. There were widespread reports in the first round of disparaging text messages against Waad's candidates, especially the Sunni Waad candidates, describing them as Godless communists and supporters of prostitution. There was also a leaflet smear campaign against Ibrahim Sharif that, according to Sharif, appeared to be organized to such an extent that he thought the security services might be behind it. Sharif told Emboffs that educated Bahrainis ignore such messages, but those who are less well-educated begin to believe these spurious messages after hearing them several times. In the context of the religious nature of most Bahrainis, messages like these may have some effect, and it is likely that the remaining opposition candidates will, in any case, have a difficult battle ahead of them in the second round runoffs.

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